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ABSTRACT

Print news media coverage of Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign was analyzed to determine whether publishers followed their roles as liberal, moderate, or conservative publications in their coverage. It was hypothesized that print media coverage would be similar across publications regardless of editorial slant, because of the dominance of the race factor in American society. Analysis of the tendencies or patterns of news coverage of the Jackson campaign included three newspapers ("USA Today," the "Wall Street Journal," the "New York Times,") and four magazines ("Time," "New Republic," the "Nation," and "National Review"). Assertions produced by the different news sources were screened sentence-by-sentence to develop a list containing all basic propositions advanced by each publication in the series of articles appearing between October 10, 1983, and April 10, 1984. The resulting data, indicating differences across publications, did not support the hypothesis. Coverage of the Jackson campaign appeared to have followed the dictates of tradition in that publishers did not allow considerations of race to alter significantly their traditional roles as liberal, conservative, or moderate publications. (HTH)

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The Jackson Presidential Campaign:

Setting the Public Agenda

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ABSTRACT

Jesse Jackson, the first black person to mount a major presidential campaign, presented a challenge to American newspaper/magazine coverage of the '84 Presidential campaign: (1) because tradition dictated that type of publication (conservative, liberal or moderate) would force content to adhere to the usual policies; and (2) because publishers had heard arguments from critics that they discriminated against minorities.

Two questions that arise are: (1) Did publishers cover the Jackson candidacy following their roles as either conservative or liberal publications, or was tradition set aside as they covered this candidate? and (2) If so, was coverage affected by Jackson's race?

Guided by the agenda-setting perspective, this study utilizes evaluative assertion analysis to classify the material published during the campaign in order to examine relationships between perceived characteristics of the candidate and coverage by the press.

It is argued that news reflects publisher/editor/writer views in that choices of what to include, exclude, emphasize or give proportional space are often based on ideologies and political dimensions.[1] As they cover presidential campaigns, by the act of coverage, by emphasis, deletion and other treatment of content, media issue implicit and explicit assertions about a candidate, campaign, leadership style and other such factors. The media often "set the agenda" of the campaign, and influence the salience of attitudes toward political candidates or issues when they mark them as either important or irrelevant.[2]

Many people viewed the 1984 U.S. Democratic Party Presidential campaign as one of the most interesting and significant elections of the post-1960s years. For, before the Jesse Jackson campaign, since 1856 only seven Afro-Americans had declared their candidacy for an American presidential nomination in a major party: Frederick Douglass in 1856, George Edwin Taylor in 1904, Rev. Clennon King in 1960, Charlene Mitchell, Dick Gregory, and Eldridge Cleaver in 1968, and, in 1972, Shirley Chisholm.[3]

Jackson, the first black person to mount a major presidential campaign, presented a challenge to the two party system, the democratic party, the black community, and to himself; moreover, the emergence of Jackson as a strong candidate created a significant challenge for American newspaper/magazine coverage of the '84 Presidential campaign. Jackson's candidacy was a challenge because on the one hand tradition dictated that type of publication (liberal, conservative or moderate) would force content to adhere to the usual policies, but at the same time publishers had heard persistent arguments from their critics, at least since the early 70's that they openly discriminated against minorities or systematically ignored them.[4] In addition, the white press believed that most whites tended to restrain

themselves from criticisms of blacks, including Jesse Jackson, because of their sensitivity to black people's victimization throughout American history. They believed Jackson was treated differently because of his color and because he hadn't a chance to win the nomination; the press concentrated on his style, and rarely addressed his stands on issues, as rivals carefully refrained from chipping away at potential voters.[5]

The study attempts to examine the ways in which this contradiction was resolved. The researchers believe publishers wanted to refrain from evoking and legitimizing the charge that they were biased towards the Jackson candidacy or that his color was a factor; however, critics argued and the researchers observations and collective perceptions led us to believe that during the campaign, Jackson was not covered with the same balance as white candidates.[6]

Two questions that arise are: (1) Did publishers cover the Jackson candidacy following their roles as either conservative or liberal publications, or was tradition set aside as they covered this candidate? and (2) was race a large enough factor to make the publications change from tradition? This study analyzes publications available during the campaign using the agenda-setting perspective and evaluative-assertion analysis to examine the relationships between publications.

The above speculations, arguments and questions led to the development of following hypothesis: Taken together, the national newspapers and newsmagazines tended to be alike in their coverage of Jesse Jackson's campaign, despite their traditional roles as either liberal or conservative publications, read by both leaders in society and the general populace: similarity of coverage occurred because of the dominance of the race factor in American society.

Method

The researchers used a modified version of evaluative assertion analysis, a generalized and multi-dimensional strategy for measuring the manifest content of statements, which was originally developed by Osgood and his associates.[7] The modified version, developed by Gerbner[8] was called "proposition analysis"; it provided a measure of the specific content composition of differential tendencies in the presentation of the same events by different news sources.

The analysis of the tendencies (patterns) of news coverage of the Jackson campaign included three newspapers and four newsmagazines. Figure 1 presents the available circulation and readership information of all publications used in the study. The three daily newspapers represent liberal and conservative publications. Two of the newsmagazines are liberal one is conservative and one is moderate.[9] Readership appeal refers to the type of reader who reads the specified publication. America's leaders (economic, political, voluntary association, media and intellectual) tend to read certain publications which are not also read by persons among the general populace. The leaders read more of everything than do others.[10]

Assertions produced by the different news sources were screened sentence-by-sentence to develop a list containing all basic propositions advanced by each publication in the series of articles which appeared during the period covered by the study, October 10, 1983 to April 10, 1984. The form of a proposition could differ from the form of the statement advancing it in that the proposition incorporated the basic ideas of the statement in an assertion form.

The material analyzed included every news, feature story, and editorial about Jackson. Every newspaper or newsmagazine carried at least four relevant articles. Assertions were drawn from all kinds of statements in the relevant sample. They included statements of the paper's own reporters and anyone else the paper chose to cite.

Part of the editorial function of the news media is to choose from the wide variety of potentially useable statements and views, those which in their best judgement, represent and shed light on facts which will assist the public in understanding issues or events. The researchers listed a total of 4,103 separate assertions as having been advanced in the statements of one or more of the cited publication. These assertions were grouped into nine categories. Each category dealt with a certain aspect or version of Jackson's public image. The categories represent sets of propositions abstracted from the total coverage. A pilot study revealed the types of categories: (1) inspiring, dynamic candidate, campaign leader, (2) personal beliefs or strengths, (3) high capability or knowledge (4) uninspiring leader (5) opportunist action (6) personal weakness (7) low capability or knowledge (8) positive ideas (i.e., Jackson is not a communist; Jackson is not the tyrant he once was) and (9) negative ideas (i.e., Some who vote for him don't want him to win; Jackson will make his failure an index of the nation's bias).

Reliability was determined on the basis of the degree to which three coders agreed. Students from the first author's Spring 1984 Survey of Communications Research course,* conducted the original indentifications of assertions. Four sets of inter-coder reliability checks were conducted resulting in a final reliability figure of 84%. Subsequently, three coders categorized the assertions; a reliability check of a 10% sample found an 89% reliability level.

*The researchers especially acknowledge Aryvetta Dunstan's work on this phase of the research.

Results

Using each article as the unit of analysis, each assertion type was evaluated as a proportion of all assertions in that article, providing an index of emphasis. Then an average (mean) was computed for each assertion type for every source.

The seven publications differed significantly (see Table 1) in their emphases in six of the nine specified categories. For example, of the assertions about Jackson that alluded to his dynamic, inspiring leadership, campaign and candidacy (var. 1), made by the seven publications, the mean proportion was 48. The leader in this category was USA Today, with a mean of 64, followed by Time with 56, Wall Street Journal with 50, and New York Times with 48. This means, for example, that on the average 64% of USA Today's assertions were of the first type. Analysis of variance reveals a significant difference between the seven publications in this category.

The liberal publications, The New York Times, and The New Republic, contributed most to the idea that Jackson was a candidate of high capability and knowledge (var. 3), while the conservative publications, The Wall Street Journal and National Review, contributed most to the idea that Jackson was an opportunist (var. 5); for the most part liberals did not present Jackson as an opportunist, nor did moderate Time magazine. Personal weakness (var. 6) was addressed by the liberal New Republic and the conservative The Nation, while low capability or knowledge (var. 7) was more frequently addressed by the The New Republic and The Nation and National Review. Negative ideas (var. 9) were frequently addressed by National Review followed by The Nation and The New Republic.

Following the analysis of variance tests, * it was revealed that for the category inspiring, dynamic campaign, candidate, leader (see Table 1),

*Scheffe Procedure

USA Today was significantly different from The New Republic and The National Review; on this dimension, The New Republic was significantly different from the The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Time and USA Today. The New York Times and The New Republic tended to emphasize Jackson's high capability and knowledge, while The Wall Street Journal and The National Review put more emphasis on Jackson as an opportunist. USA Today was significantly different from The New Republic in assertions about Jackson's personal weakness. The New Republic, The Nation and National Review differed significantly from Time and USA Today about Jackson's low capability or knowledge. The National Review, The Nation and The New Republic were more prone to focus on negative ideas about the Jackson candidacy.

When identified according to the ideological orientation of their primary readership (liberal, conservative, or moderate), analysis of variance revealed that liberal and conservative publications differed significantly (see Table 2) in four of the nine categories.

The Scheffe Procedure, performed after the analysis of variance tests, revealed that liberal publications published more assertions than either conservative or moderate ones in discussing Jackson's high capability or knowledge. Conservatives paid more attention to Jackson's perceived opportunistic actions than did liberals or moderates. Conservative sources were more likely to present assertions about Jackson's ideas than moderates or liberals.

In table 3, reader type refers to the primary readers of the publications, either leaders or members of the general populace. Publication type is categorized as either newspaper or magazine, and frequency of publication refers to daily, weekly, or bi-weekly frequencies of publications. Reader type, publication type and frequency of publication had significant bearing on the

various categories. For example, on variable 1, only 45% of the assertions in articles which publishers targeted to leaders alluded to Jackson's inspiring leadership, whereas 61% of the assertions in articles targeted to the general populace were of this type; on the average, 51% of the assertions in newspapers were devoted to this category, while 33% of the assertions in magazines focused upon this idea. In addition, the researchers determined that daily publications presented assertions of this variety more frequently than weeklies or bi-weeklies.

Using the number of assertions of a particular type as the dependent variable, with the individual article as the unit of analysis, a series of regressions was performed to estimate the contribution to explained variance associated with knowledge of the sources, their ideological orientation, or the type of publication. R-squared, as a measure of variance explained by the predictor variables differed substantially between classes of assertions (see Table 4). With the names of six of the seven periodicals entered as dummy variables, R- squared ranged from .10 to .54, and all equations were significant at the .01 level or better. In eight out of the nine equations, The Nation entered as the first predictor, explaining the greatest proportion of the variance in assertions. This analysis reinforces impressions derived from the analysis of differential emphasis by these sources.

When we examine the contribution of political orientation to knowledge of the number of assertions, it is clear that the variance between sources is greater than that between types. In only one of nine cases did knowledge of the political orientation make a significant contribution to variance in the number of assertions of a particular type. In that case, where the assertions were about Jackson as a highly capable or knowledgeable leader, the liberal periodicals were more likely to offer more assertions to their readers.

In fact, knowledge of whether the source was a newspaper or a magazine explained more of the variance in assertions than knowledge of the political orientation of that source (Table 4).

In order to determine structure of portrayals or the pattern of relations between assertions, Pearson Correlation Coefficients were estimated on the basis of differential emphasis on certain assertions. Assertion types which appeared together frequently would be seen to be positively correlated. This approach (see Figure 2) revealed that writers tended to group assertions about Jackson's personal weakness with statements about opportunism ($r = .15$) and propositions about his low capability with ideas about personal weakness ($r = .12$) Discussion of personal weakness often accompanied dicussions of negative ideas (.12). Discussion of negative ideas was often grouped with low capability statements ($r = .15$). However, it appeared that most sources presented a balanced examination of Jackson's program such that negative ideas often were presented alongside positive ideas ($r = .13$).

Discussion

Liberal USA Today and New York Times and moderate Time Magazine were significantly different from other publications in referring to Jackson's inspiring, dynamic campaign, candidacy and leadership. The New York Times and USA Today also led on personal beliefs and strengths, while the New York Times and the New Republic led on high capability and knowledge. All of the above were positive dimensions. The liberal New York Times, moderate Time and the conservative Wall Street Journal and National Review differed significantly in their reports about Jackson as an opportunist, from the conservative Wall Street Journal and National Review. The liberal USA Today made fewer statements about Jackson's low capability and knowledge than did the other publications.

From the analysis of materials published during the '84 presidential campaign, it appears that the hypothesis was not supported by the data. The differences between individual publications was considerably more important than were differences between publications as broad ideological types. While knowledge of their position on the political continuum was useful as a predictor of their use of certain assertions, it was more helpful to know which publication it was in particular. So contrary to expectations, coverage of the Jackson campaign appears to have followed the dictates of tradition in that publishers did not allow considerations of race to significantly alter their traditional roles as either liberal, conservative or moderate publications.

Future studies should utilize content analyses of the Jackson campaign to determine if liberals were less liberal and conservatives more strident with Jackson than with other candidates, and if perceptions about the candidate changed over time.

It should be noted that there was no attempt by the researchers to identify assertions and assertion types as to liberal or conservative types; instead the analyses focused on differences in emphasis between publications. Future analyses should establish a tendency regarding all candidates and determine if there is a departure from that tendency when dealing with a black candidate.

NOTES

[1] Gerbner, G. (1964). "Ideological perspective & political tendencies in news reporting," Journalism Quarterly, 41: 495-516: Hopple, G.W. (1982). "International news coverage in two elite newspapers," Journal of Communication, 32: 61-74.

[2] McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1972-73). "The agenda-setting function of mass media, "Public Opinion Quarterly. 36.

[3] Walton, H., & Clark, R. (Spring 1972). "Black presidential candidates past and present," New South, 27: 2.

[4] See National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1968). Report on the Commission, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, New York: Bantam; Fedler, F. (1973). "The media & minority groups: a study of adequacy of access," Journalsim Quarter. Barron, J. (June 1967). "Access to the press: a new first amendment right," Harvard Law Review, 80: 1946-7.

[5] Thomas, E. (1984). "Pride and prejudice," Time, May 7

[6] Friendly, J. (1984, March 8). "Jackson candidacy raises new questions of press performance," New York Times.

[7] Osgood, C. (1959). The respresentational model, in Ithiel de Sola Pool, (Ed.), Trends in Content Analysis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 33-88.

[8] Gerbner (1964).

[9] Katz, W. & L. Katz. (1982). Magazines for Libraries (4th Edition), (N.Y.: R.R. Bowker); Kaiser, C. & N. Stadtman, "Gannett's national gamble," Newsweek: 100, Sept. 20, 101-2.

[10] Weiss, C. (1974). "What America's leader read," Public Opinion Quarterly, 38: 1.

Figure 1

News Publications Studied

Public.	*Circul.	Sched.	*Type	**Readers
Newspapers				
N. Y. Times	1,400,000	Daily	Lib.	Leader
Wall St. J.	1,900,000	Daily	Cons.	Leader
USA Today	1,200,000	***Daily	****Lib.	General
Newsmagazines				
Time	4,000,000	Weekly	Mod.	General
The Nat.	30,000	Weekly	Lib.	Leader
New Rep.	79,000	Weekly	Lib.	Leader
Nat. Rev.	100,000	Bi-Weekly	Cons.	Leader

* Katz, William and Linda, Magazines for Libraries (4th Edition), R.R. Bowker, 1982.

** Carol H. Weiss, "What America's Leaders Read," Public Opinion Quarterly, (38)(1), 1974, pp. 1-22.

*** Wall Street Journal, June 22, 1984.

**** Kaiser, Charles and Nancy Stadtman, "Gannett's National Gamble," Newsweek: 100, Sept. 20, 1982, 101-2.

Table 1

Relative Importance of Assertions in Each Article as Indicated by One-Way Analysis of Variance

VARIABLES	Publications (Mean Percentages) NYT	WSJ	UST	TIM	NAT	REP	REV	F	Assertions (N)
1	48	50	64	56	22	14	20	5.6***	1764
2	8	4	11	3	6	5	6	.9	283
3	9	3	3	1	1	7	1	3.4**	212
4	17	8	14	17	19	15	17	1.3	677
5	.3	4	2	.3	3	3	4	2.6*	57
6	3	4	1	5	13	17	6	3.5**	221
7	2	1	.2	0	3	4	3	3.6**	81
8	6	15	3	10	11	10	1.	2.0	362
9	6	12	.3	7	21	21	30	8.4**	446
									4103

Variables: 1=inspiring, dynamic candidate, campaign, leader
2=Personal beliefs or strengths
3=High capability or knowledge
4=Uninspiring leader
5=Opportunist action
6=Personal weakness
7=Low capability or knowledge
8=Positive ideas
9=Negative ideas

*$p \leq .05$
**$p \leq .01$
***$p \leq .001$

Table 2

Relative Importance of Assertions in Each Article by Publication's Political Orientation, as Indicated by One-Way Analysis of Variance

	VARIABLES									
Political Orientation	1)	2)	3)	4	5	6	7	8	9	(n)
Lib	47	8	8ab	17	1c	4	2	6d	7e	136
Cons.	44	5	2a	11	4c	4	1	14d	15e	42
Mod	56	3	1b	18	3	5	0	10	7	12
F	.8	1.8	6.6**	2.5	6.0**	.1	2.4	5.3**	6.4**	

Note: Common subscript indicates pairs of means that are significantly different, $p \leq .10$ (Scheffe Procedure used).

Table 3

Relative Importance of Assertions in Each Article by Reader Type, Publication Type and Publication Frequency

VARIABLES	Reader Type		F	Public. Type		F	Freq. of Pub.			F
	Ldr/Gen			(NP/Mag)			D	W	BW	
1	45	61	8.6**	51	33	11.3**	50	36	21	6.6**
2	6	8	.3	7	4	1.0	7	4	6	.6
3	7	2	5.3*	7	2	4.7	7	3	1	2.5
4	15	15	0	15	17	.6	15	17	18	.3
5	1	2	0	1	2	.5	1	2	4	.7
6	4	3	.6	3	9	10.6**	3	11	6	6.0**
7	2	.1	4.8*	2	3	2.4	2	3	3	1.2
8	9	6	1.1	8	11	1.2	8	10	13	.7
9	10	3	6.1*	7	18	20.0***	7	14	30	15.0***

*$p \leq .05$

**$p \leq .01$

***$p \leq .001$

Table 4

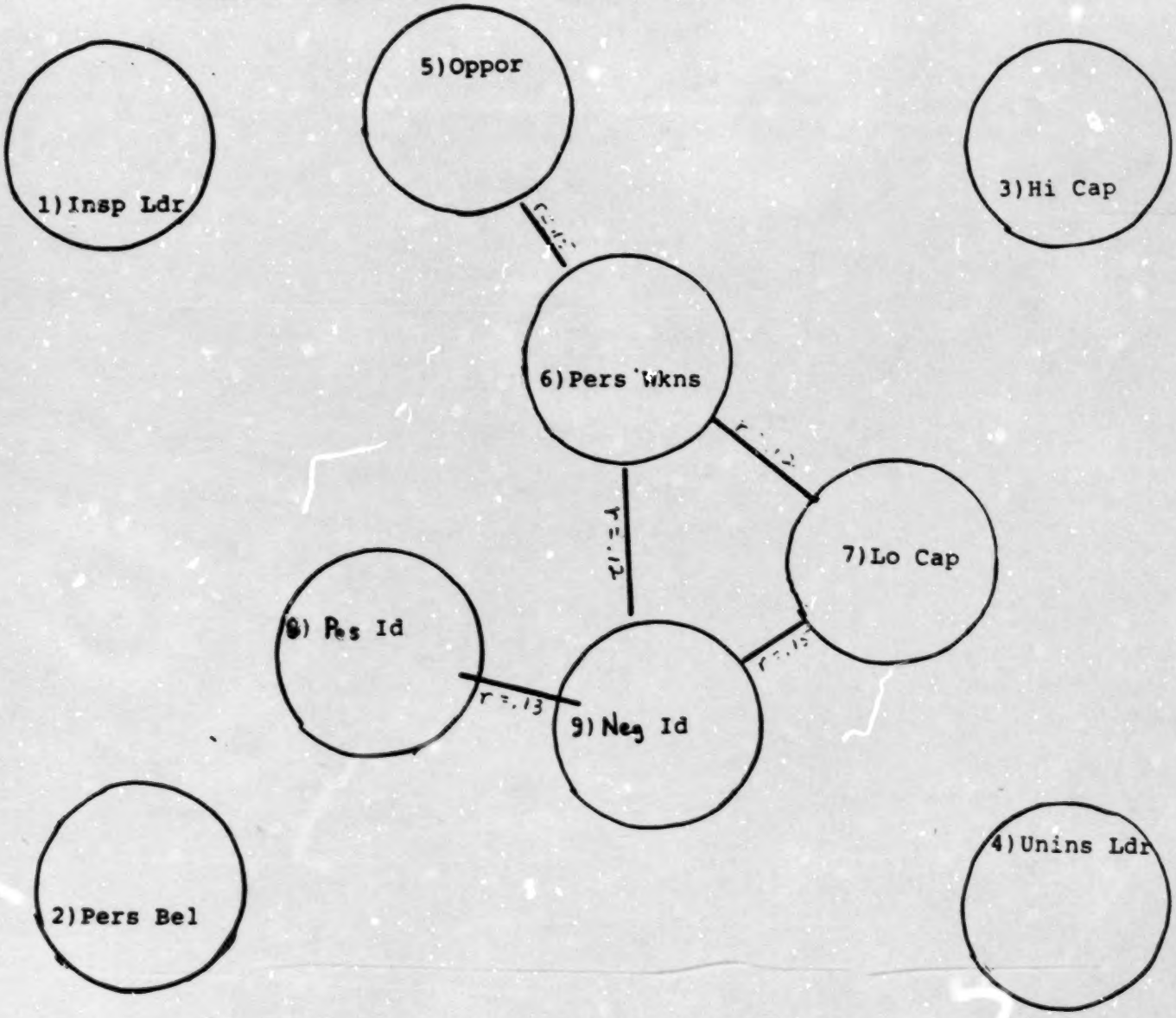
Prediction of Number of Assertions Per Article

Assertion Type	PREDICTORS (R2)		
	Sources: Publications	Orientations: Liberal/Cons	Type: Newsp./Mags
1 Insp Ld	.13**	.00	.00
2 PersBe	.11**	.01	.02
3 HiCap	.10**	.06**	.00
4 UnInsp	.36**	.00	.11***
5 Oppor	.32***	.01	.08***
6 PersWkns	.42***	.00	.17***
7 LoCap	.35***	.03	.10***
8 PosId	.31***	.01	.12***
9 NegId	.54***	.02	.24***

* =p .05
** =p .01
*** =p .001

Figure 2

Corregram Showing Highest Correlations of Variables



Note: The shorter the line the stronger the correlation between variables. No lines indicates no systematic correlation found.